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ABSTRACT

Summer 1995 saw an increased enrollment in graduate study at William Carey College (Mississippi) and this rapid growth established a need for student input concerning graduate courses. Graduate staff were largely interested in student satisfaction particularly with course offerings, time and location of offerings, and future interests of students. A survey was given to graduate students at the college in the summer of 1995 to determine if the needs of the students were being met. The survey consisted of 30 questions concerning the graduate program. The survey contained additional questions concerning demographics of those answering the survey. Respondents (N=133) were students in nine graduate classes, randomly selected from the course listings of the main campus and branches. Time of day for course offerings was ranked the highest priority by the graduate students. Students expressed overall satisfaction with the program. Studying in groups with sample questions was seen to be useful advance preparation for comprehensive exams. The students wanted a more updated library facility. The students were not satisfied with the limited offerings for projected class schedules. (Author/JLS)

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Assessing Needs of Graduate Students at William Carey College

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January 10, 1997

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Abstract

A survey was given to graduate students at William Carey College in the summer of 1995 to determine if the needs of the students were being fulfilled. The survey consisted of thirty questions concerning the graduate program. The survey contained additional questions concerning demographics of those answering the survey. A total of 133 graduate students responded in nine graduate classes which were randomly selected from the course listings on the main campus and branches. Time of day for course offerings was ranked the highest priority by the graduate students. These students also expressed satisfaction with the program. Studying in groups with sample questions was important as advance preparation for comprehensive exams. The students wanted a more updated library facility. The students were not satisfied with the limited offerings for projected class schedules.

Summer 1995 evidenced an increased enrollment at William Carey College for graduate study. The rapid growth established a need for student input concerning graduate courses. The increase in enrollment was due in part to increased financial aid offered by the state to Mississippi teachers and to the encouragement of school administrators. Enrollment at William Carey College has since almost doubled.

Introduction to Research graduate students instructed by Dr. Read Diket adopted as a project to seek information from the other graduate students at William Carey College. They prepared a survey, administered it, and tallied the results. This paper discusses those results and includes a copy of the 1995 survey. The survey is attached as Appendix "A". Administrators at William Carey College planned to use results as a formative tool to modify the graduate program.

Statement of Problem

Due to increased enrollment at William Carey College, the staff determined that a survey should be administered to graduate students as to their satisfaction with the program. Graduate staff were largely interested in student satisfaction with course offerings, time and location of offerings, and future interests of students.

Review of Related Literature

Educators and administrators may evaluate their institutions in part through students' satisfaction. Student satisfaction is a good indicator of attitudes about programs, schools, or educational departments. Student satisfaction is defined, based on Hoppock (1935), as psychological, physiological and environmental conditions which make students satisfied when they feel that their performance is fairly rewarded (Mescal, Glassnapp, and Hatley, 1974).

Higher education must make a commitment to provide quality education that is responsive to the needs of students. To encourage older students to enroll in and complete graduate degree programs, universities have altered admissions policies, opened adult student service offices, and offered course schedules that meet adult students' need for flexibility. Courses are often offered on weekends, at off-campus locations including corporate offices, or via telecommunication networks (Cirasa-Parish, 1993).

In responses to a survey at a technical college, students express dissatisfaction when information is not provided in a timely fashion. If advisors neglect to give information to students or cannot be located for advice, students are dissatisfied. Students also express a desire for classes to be held in different locations. Participants in the technical

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college study comment negatively on the way comprehensive exams are given. Many express the need to cram for exams while others complain about the lack of information provided regarding the exams. Students see benefit in the formation of study groups. Many students express the desire to have take-home comprehensive exams rather than timed tests, often the way in which comprehensive exams are given. Stated also in the responses, off-campus students respond positively to the courses that are available at off-campus sites. It was suggested, however, that courses be sequenced and clarified (Fontina, 1993).

Issues of recognition, program identification and environment are discussed in Pina's 1993 paper. Program requirements, emphases, course offerings, internships, funding, opportunity for student productivity and reputation are several factors students consider when trying to decide about a program in technology education.

Western Michigan University undertook a study to determine the relationship between student satisfaction with the Educational Leadership department graduate study program that considered the time students had been in the program. Students who were the most satisfied were those who had spent the most time in the program (Rubino, 1992).

Another research study discusses strategies for helping career center staff to increase faculty awareness, interest and

involvement in a variety of programs, services, and resources offered that help student with career planning and placement. The project provided students with useful graduate program information, helped faculty realize available programs in this area, and improved advice given to students, which in turn led to improved curriculum in the human behavior department (Arthur, 1990).

Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were investigated in the Carey study:

(1) William Carey College graduate students will rank class hours their highest priority. Classes often interfere with both business and personal events. The majority of graduate students are employed, thus it seems important to coordinate business hours with class hours. Often employers are less than cooperative; they are reluctant to allow employees to leave early to attend day or evening classes. If class hours are not compatible with work hours, it can add to the length of time to complete a degree.

(2) William Carey College graduate students will record moderate satisfaction with the program. If, however, students experience difficulty in the scheduling of classes, registration, and business office inadequacies they will record less satisfaction.

(3) William Carey College graduate students desire sample comprehensive exam questions. According to Fontina (1993), students desire formation of study groups for comprehensive exams. Sample questions would reduce the stress brought on by not knowing what to study. Students could enter comprehensive examinations feeling competent and prepared.

(4) William Carey College graduate students will record that the library should be updated. William Carey College provides limited resources. Many journals such as Phi Delta Kappa, Journal of Educational Research, and Reading Improvement are not available. In order to do basic research, students are forced to seek other sources such as the Cook Library at the University of Southern Mississippi. A problem also exists with the hours the library is open. More flexible or extended hours are needed.

(5) William Carey College graduate students prefer one year advance notice of class offerings. Many classes are offered only once per year. Some of these classes are required for completion of a particular program. If a schedule of classes for an entire year is offered, students can prioritize and schedule all necessary classes.

(6) Child care will be a concern for William Carey College students. Administrators were considering a child care program for students' dependents.

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Method

Subjects

Selection of the sample subjects were selected by using a random sampling process. Classes were numbered one through nineteen. A table of Random Numbers was used to select the classes. One-half of available classes were chosen to participate in the project. Participants were drawn from intact classes selected from scheduled summer graduate course work on the Hattiesburg campus with two from the coast campus for comparison purposes. Students in more than one of the sampled classes were asked to respond to the survey only once. Nine of the graduate classes at William Carey College were randomly selected to complete the survey during the fourth week of the 1995 summer session.

Instrument

The effectiveness of the services of William Carey College to its graduate students were monitored through a survey. A random selection of classes participated in a written survey devised by selected graduate students.

Procedure

In the summer of 1995, a pilot survey was conducted and administered by members of an Introduction to Research course. The survey instrument was amended to include additional demographic information. Certain questions were clarified for

coding purposes. A list of scheduled summer graduate classes was obtained. Using this list, nine classes were randomly selected to participate in the descriptive study. Students in these nine classes were given a survey instrument to complete. To avoid duplication, students and instructors were instructed to respond to the survey only one time.

Data was encoded from returned surveys. Manual tabulation of responses was accomplished in matrix format. The data was then entered into the computer. The resulting analysis of data is to be used by William Carey College administrators to improve the graduate program.

Discussion

The survey given contained thirty questions. Table 1 indicates some of those questions, with the percentage given for yes and no answers and other questions are answered with in different ways, i.e. Likert Scale. Several questions were ranked and are presented differently than yes and no questions. Some of the questions are discussed in paragraph form. How the question was asked affects how it is presented in tabular form. (See Tables 1-4).

Table 1.

Graduate Student Survey

VARIABLE	TOTAL RESPONSES	% YES	% NO
Would the location of classes (off-campus) be helpful?	114	*56	44
Would child care (during class hours) be beneficial to you as a graduate student?	115	21	*79
Would greater access to computers be helpful to you as a graduate student?	133	*74	26
Were you made aware of summer grants and scholarships through the state department?	130	*58	42
Has it inconvenienced you that some journals have been discontinued at the WCC library?	122	46	*54
Have you experienced problems with conflicts in class schedules?	129	30	*70
Would you take a computer technology class?	126	*71	29
Does WCC have adequate reference materials?	114	46	*54
Is the current regular and summer course offering adequate to your needs?	128	*77	23
Should all students have some flexibility in course work?	125	*89	11
Do you receive advance schedules for classes in the mail?	131	44	*56
Are your current courses geared to graduate level rather than a repeat of undergraduate work?	126	*93	7
Are instructors available during posted office hours?	119	*96	4
Do you receive adequate counseling from your advisor in graduate work?	123	*88	12
Do you receive adequate information on competency exams, mini courses, and class schedules in a timely, efficient manner?	120	*72	28
Did you receive a graduate handbook when you registered?	130	*68	32

* dominant response

Table 2.

Graduate Student Satisfaction

	VARIABLE	MEAN	STD. DEV.	COUNT
A	Rate of satisfaction with WCC graduate program	4.16	0.80	128
B	How far in advance should you have projected schedules for planning course sequences?	2.26	1.21	128
C	How many courses have you taken at WCC?	5.78	7.46	125

*Note: Student respondents had completed between three and four courses.

A: 5 = Extremely Satisfied
4 = Well Satisfied
3 = Moderately Satisfied
2 = Somewhat Satisfied
1 = Not at all Satisfied

B: 3 = Year in Advance
2 = Semester in Advance
1 = Two Semesters in Advance

Students were asked to rank their satisfaction with the graduate program using the above coding system (see Table 2). Mean satisfaction was 4.16. The satisfaction rate was just above well satisfied.

Students were asked about priority for projected class planning. The mean fell around a semester in advance.

Most student respondents had completed between 5 and 6 courses.

The following areas of concern were prioritized by William Carey College graduate students (see Table 3). Hypotheses 6, student interest in child care on campus, was not a priority.

Table 3.

Scheduling

Days of the week class is scheduled	2
Hours the classes are scheduled	1
Location of the class	3
Child care during scheduled classes	6
Computer access	5
Library adequacy	4

1 = Highest priority; 6 = Lowest priority

Graduate students were offered a choice of days on which classes could meet (see Table 4). The subjects were not limited in number of choices they could select. Out of the total responses, Tuesday received 27% of the responses. Monday and Thursday were close with 24% and 25% respectively. Wednesday received 17%, followed by Friday with 6% and Saturday with 1%.

Table 4.

Percentages Reflecting Day of Week Preferences

	TOTAL RESPONSES	M	T	W	T	F	S
#	385	93	104	64	95	21	8
%	100%	24%	27%	17%	25%	6%	1%

*Note: Percents were rounded to nearest integer

Students were also asked if they needed a wider variety of classes than was offered summer 1995. Thirty-four percent (34%)

of the students responded that they did; 63% responded that they did not. No responses were recorded by 3% of the students.

Seventy-three percent (73%) answered that the current regular and summer course offerings were adequate to their needs. Twenty-two percent (22%) responded that offerings were not adequate while 5% failed to respond to the question. Of the students surveyed, 85% had completed 3 to 4 classes toward their graduate degree.

There was a short section at the end of the survey for demographics (see Table 5). The results are as follows:

Table 5.

Demographics

Male/Female			Married			Age (yrs)	
Questioned	133	%	Questioned	133	%	Questioned	133
Male	26	20%	Yes	100	76%	Oldest	55
Female	105	80%	No	31	24%	Youngest	22
No response	2		No response	2		Mean	36

Distance traveled	(miles)
Greatest	150
Shortest	.5
Mean	38

Average Class Load	Completed graduate hours
6 hours (2 classes) per 10 week term	Mean 12 hours (4 courses)

Financial Aid		Classes currently taking
Yes	62.5%	Mean 6 hours (2 courses)
No	37.5%	

Conclusion

Graduate students did rank class hours as being their highest priority. The students were well satisfied with the graduate program overall. William Carey College graduate students were concerned about comprehensive examination questions and stated that sample questions and study groups would help foster confidence. The William Carey College library was a concern for graduate students, however, it was not listed as among the highest priorities. This could be due to the fact that the University of Southern Mississippi is near to William Carey College and may be convenient for some of the graduate students. The students did, however, state a need for increased availability to educational journals at William Carey College. The students at William Carey College stated satisfaction with a semester advance notice of course schedules, rather than stating a strong need for a year's advance notice. Child care was not perceived as a dominant need.

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